

Time to Climb Aboard the Inner Purple Line

By Tom Perez and Peter Shapiro

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Addressing revitalization and transportation are among the highest priorities in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. There is consensus among our political leadership that the time for action is now.

There is one-*and only one*- major transportation project for which we can break ground in 2005. There is one-*and only one*- major transportation project that can have the first leg completed by 2008, meaning we can actually be moving people, reducing traffic and improving quality of life. There is one-*and only one*- major transportation project that has attracted the support of environmental groups, Chambers of Commerce and other business leaders, Progressive Maryland and other grassroots organizations, civic associations and other neighborhood groups, and communities of color.

There is one- *and only one*- major transportation project that has been endorsed by Prince George's County Executive Jack Johnson, the Prince George's County Council (9-0), and the Montgomery County Council (7-2) because it will serve as the catalyst for the economic revitalizations of Takoma/Langley Crossroads and other communities in our counties.

That project is the Inner Purple Line, the 14 mile Light Rail line that will connect Bethesda and College Park and New Carrollton. The Inner Purple Line responds to the reality that our commuting patterns are no longer simply north/south. People live in College Park and commute to Bethesda; people in Silver Spring and Bethesda commute to the University of Maryland and several major government installations in Prince George's County. Many low income workers in Langley Park spend three hours a day taking multiple buses to get to and from their minimum wage jobs in White Flint. The Inner Purple Line station in Langley Park will enable them to reduce their total commute to one hour. Imagine a transportation solution that would enable mothers and fathers to spend two more hours per day with their families.

That solution is at our fingertips, and time is of the essence. Every six years, Congress reauthorizes the transportation bill that funds all major mass transit projects in the United States. The transportation bill is up for reauthorization this year, and the Maryland delegation to Congress must submit our state's list of preferences in the next two months. It is critically important for political leaders across Montgomery and Prince George's County to reach consensus on the Inner Purple Line.

With the Montgomery County Planning Board now united behind a 10-year-old plan to provide light rail service between Bethesda and Silver Spring, the good news is that there is near consensus on the need to build the Inner Purple Line.

The lone dissenting voice is Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan. We have great respect for Doug Duncan. He has been very helpful on a host of issues of mutual concern to Montgomery and Prince George's County, such as the revitalization of Takoma/Langley crossroads, which borders Montgomery and Prince George's Counties.

His opposition to the Inner Purple Line appears to be softening because he is standing alone among the region's political leaders. We ask Mr. Duncan to join us.

The latest alternative being floated by the Duncan administration raises overall cost of the Inner Purple Line by at least \$600 million, and probably more. This latest plan will delay a transit solution and revitalization of our communities by years. The need for a new Environmental Impact Study and disruptions to a host of newly affected communities may kill any new transit initiative in Prince Georges and Montgomery Counties for the next six years.

If there is any heartening news about the latest trial balloon, it is that the alignment continues to get closer to the real Inner Purple Line. However, close is not enough given the need to tap into federal transportation dollars now.

The Inner Purple Line will not solve all our woes. No one solution will. But the Inner Purple Line will significantly improve the lives of tens of thousands of working families in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties.

We agree with County Executive Duncan's repeated pleas that the time for action is now. The Inner Purple Line train is getting ready to leave the station; it's quite crowded with supporters. But there is still room left for more people. It's time to climb aboard.

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